CHILDREN and their PICTURES

PREPARED BY

THE ART BRANCH

ONTARIO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

THE RYERSON PRESS

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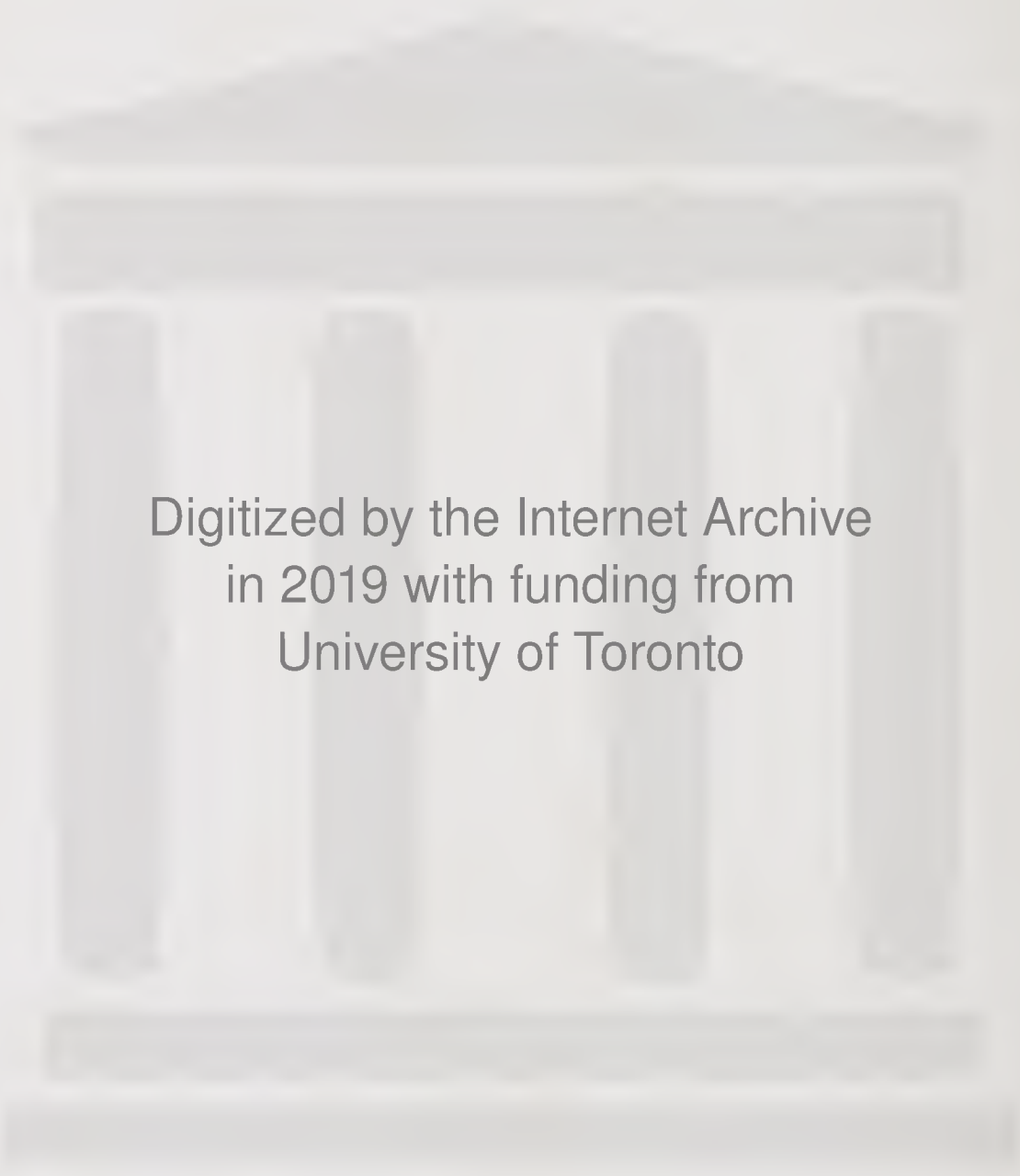
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V. Depew

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PRINTED AND BOUND IN CANADA
BY THE RYERSON PRESS, TORONTO

FOREWORD

Picture-making is basic to any programme of education for young children. It is necessary, therefore, that every teacher should have some knowledge of this work. There appears to be a need for a concise statement as to the nature of picture-making in the classroom, the minimum equipment and supplies required, and the rôle which a teacher might play to bring about desirable activities on the part of the children. The need is also apparent for a brief account, in language which is not technical, of the forms of expression which might be expected from children of varying age groups.

This small book has been written to meet these needs at least in part. The information offered is a summary of experimental work with thousands of children over a period of six years. The original manuscript took the form of two scripts for films. These films have been produced by Crawley Films, Ltd., Ottawa, for the International Film Bureau of Chicago, and are listed as Nos. 7 and 8 in the *Creative Hands* series. Film No. 7 deals with picture-making by very young children, while No. 8 depicts the activities of pre-adolescents.

In the films, one may see children and teachers in action, together with some of the actual paintings of

the children. In this book, on the other hand, one may study in greater detail the theory relative to the subject. While both the book and the films may be used separately, it is believed that each will greatly augment the other.

It is not intended in this book to offer prescriptions for the teaching of picture-making. Rather, this volume presents some of the major problems facing any teacher, and points the way to courses of action which have been found beneficial to others. The reader must in the long run discover his own solutions to any aspect of the art of teaching. Teaching, like art, is a personal matter and must depend upon varying circumstances. It is hoped, however, that busy teachers will find herein a summary of considerable value to them of a tremendously important field of education.

C. D. G.

Toronto,
January 19, 1951.

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1. WHAT IS PICTURE-MAKING?

When a young child makes a picture, his statement is usually very personal. He is not likely, for example, to draw a flower by itself; rather he prefers to make a picture about "Me picking flowers." In other words, picture-making in the minds of children is not an act of drawing only things. It is an activity in which the young painter tells something about himself and his world. His work includes his feelings and his thoughts. Picture-making, therefore, should not be considered as just a display of skill in drawing. It is a communication from one human being to another. *It is a personal statement in pictorial form of a child's reactions to his life.*

2. WHY TEACH PICTURE-MAKING IN SCHOOL?

No child is being educated in school unless he is enjoying a regular programme of picture-making. No matter what other subjects he may study, he misses something very important if he is denied the exercise of making statements in pictorial form.

Children learn to paint as naturally as they learn to speak. They can paint with meaning long before they can communicate messages in writing. Indeed, the act of making pictures is a natural and basic activity

for all human beings. Cave men did it, and man has continued to express himself pictorially ever since. Unfortunately, bad educational practices have prevented many mature people from continuing this natural form of expression.

Picture-making helps general education. In making a picture, a child must think about experiences in his life. This thinking-over process is highly educative because a child comes to grips with experience while he is engaged in picture-making. He clarifies his thoughts and feelings and gives them coherent form. Thus he learns about life in general.

3. WHAT MUST A TEACHER DO?

If picture-making is such a natural form of expression for children, is there any work for a teacher to do? The answer is definitely, *yes*. First, the teacher must see that suitable supplies and equipment are available. Next, she must arrange the physical conditions of the classroom so that maximum use is made of available painting surfaces. Third, she must, when necessary, motivate the children's interests in topics for painting. Later, she must offer timely and suitable guidance. Finally, she must treat the finished work with respect.

(i) Supplies and Equipment

Young children like big brushes and large sheets of paper. This is because they paint with the large muscles of the arm, rather than with the finger muscles. At first they should be given brushes with bristles at

least one-half an inch wide and with ten-inch handles. The bristles are of hog's hair (See Plate 1).

The minimum size of paper should be 12″ x 18″. The paper can be newsprint, manilla, ordinary wrapping paper, or "sugar" paper.

Tempera paint should be provided. As many as eight colours may eventually be used, together with black and white. Tempera paint may be bought in either liquid or dry-powered form.

As alternatives to the use of paint, young children can make pictures with large wax crayons, with coloured paper and with soft chalks.

(ii) Physical Arrangements

There are many convenient classroom arrangements for painting. Ordinary tables may be provided if there is room. Drop-leaf tables may be placed under the blackboards. Little children can paint on the floor provided that it has a clean covering.

For the beginners, one colour should be placed in jars or tins, and each child should be provided with one brush. Later, more colours should be available. To prevent accidents, the tins or jars holding the colours should be placed in a cardboard or wooden box, or in a wire basket such as the milkman uses (See Plate 2).

Several colours require the provision of one jar of clean water in which a child may wash his brush, or one brush for each colour.

As children gain experience in their painting, they may be provided with arrangements which allow them more freedom. Paint jars may be placed on a shelf. For each jar a spoon or paddle should be provided. Under the first shelf a second wider one might be built on which the children may rest their other supplies. Both shelves should be covered with oil cloth or linoleum. The children file past the jars, dipping out the colours they require into a muffin tin having six or eight depressions. If there is no sink in the classroom, water may be placed in pails. The children dip out water with a small jug, placing the water in a vacant space in the muffin tin.

Older children should also have greater freedom in their selection of brushes. Smaller brushes which come to a point and are made of soft hair ("camel's hair" or "sable") should be available. Size five to size eight brushes are suitable. All brushes should be stored in jars with the bristles up.

The more experienced children should be allowed to choose paper from a selection which has been placed on a table. The paper should be of various sizes, types and colours.

Of course, paint cloths will be handy for wiping brushes and for cleaning up paint or water which may have spilled. Also, a clothesline is useful for hanging up wet paintings (See Plate 2).

(iii) Motivation

Children find topics for painting in their lives at home, at play, at school, or in the community in general.

Photograph courtesy Crawley Films Limited, Ottawa, taken from the film "Creative Hands No. 7."

1. The Child

Full of ideas and fearless in his approach to this work, the young child is a natural painter. His curiosity over the materials and tools, as well as over the effects he may achieve with them, keeps him deeply absorbed. The activity of painting provides him with a method of learning scarcely to be duplicated by any other means.

Photograph courtesy Crawley Films Limited, Ottawa, taken from the film "Creative Hands No. 7."

2. The Teacher

Acting as a guide and counsellor, the teacher has an important part to play in the picture-making programme. She must see that suitable accommodation, supplies and equipment are available. Also, she is expected to provide inspiration and encouragement when they are needed. She must never force her adult forms of expression upon the children, however, but rather, must assist the youngsters to say what they want to say in the way they want to say it.

3. "Me Carrying Parcels"

This painting by a six-year-old boy shows how naturally a child can create a strong design, and how clearly he can convey a message in pictorial form. Notice the exaggeration in size of the arms, which is this child's method of giving point to an important part of his story.

4. "Me Doing Homework"

This is a "fold-over" picture. The eight-year-old girl has no hesitation in adopting this method of drawing to help her express an idea. This form of expression is frequently found in the work of young children.

5. "Our Thanksgiving Turkey"

This drawing in chalk by an eight-year-old is called a "series" picture. At the lower right is the turkey in a pen. Above is the oven in which the turkey is roasting. Finally, the same turkey is seen on the table ready to be eaten. The lines from the oven are the "good smells of our turkey cooking." The picture is also of the X-ray type, because one can see both the inside and outside of the same house.

Children paint what they know as well as what they see.

6. "The Train at the Station"

This is a painting in tempera by a seven-year-old. Notice how strong is his sense of design. There is no substitute for subject matter selected from first-hand experience. Trips to points of interest such as railway stations, factories, parks, zoos, a general store, a farm, or a village fair, bring a rich reward in pictures made by children.

7. "Our Hockey Team"

The nine-year-old gang-age painter shows the excitement he feels about his theme. Notice the agitation of line which he uses with telling effect. Art is one school subject which makes ample room for the use of the emotions as well as of the intellect.

8. "The Dancing Lesson"

This eleven-year-old girl selects a subject which no self-respecting boy of a comparable age would consider. As children become older, their sex has greater bearing upon their choice of subjects and often upon their methods of painting.

Children run about and have all manner of interesting experiences. However, they do not think about making pictures while they are having these experiences. Frequently, the teacher must help the youngsters to recall the events in their lives so that their interest in the topic under discussion and their excitement about it will grow. A theme might be introduced with a general question such as: "What did you do last Saturday?", "What did you see on your way to school?" or "Which part of the story did you like best?". Various responses will be forthcoming. After these are discussed and the teacher feels that each member of the class has a sufficiently clear idea of what he wishes to depict, painting may begin. Should some children not be in need of such stimulation, but have clearly in mind a topic for painting, they should be allowed to paint immediately.

(iv) Guidance

When a child starts to paint his ideas are not complete. As he faces the task of painting, he is presented with many problems as to how to proceed. This state of hesitancy is good, because it stimulates thinking.

The teacher must take care not to do the thinking for the child. The child must learn "to stand on his own feet" and not run to the teacher to think for him.

The teacher must be careful to see, however, that children do not fail in their efforts for want of necessary guidance. Should a child in a group be unable to start a picture, he would require some individual attention. Questions by the teacher related to the topic may help the child. She might ask him about

the title of his picture or about the most important character to be painted.

Once painting has begun, some children require help in recalling facts about the main theme. For example, in making a painting of "Me at the fire," a child might place an outline of himself on paper. Such a statement might be acceptable from the youngest children. As the child gains in age and experience, however, he may be expected to enlarge upon his topics. The teacher might ask: "Who helped to put out the fire?", "How did they get to the fire?", "What did they use to put out the fire?", "Were you afraid?".

Some older children may not be satisfied with their ability to draw objects. It often helps to have some children carefully observe the objects they wish to draw. If a child wants to draw a cat, let him look at a cat.

He might wish to draw an elephant in connection with an illustration dealing with a previous visit to a circus. If the circus has left town, it would be difficult for him to see this beast. Visual aids must then be used. Films in colour, photographs, or drawings of elephants may be studied. When the child starts to work, the visual aids should usually be set aside. This is particularly true with regard to the drawings of others. He must not copy, but rather, recall the facts of experience.

Although children are often naturally good designers, they sometimes have trouble with design and require guidance. Little children may draw on too small a scale for the paper they use. This difficulty may be

overcome by providing brushes as large as one inch wide. The teacher might remind the children that they should paint so that all classmates may see what they are saying in their pictures. Therefore, they should paint boldly.

Older children make objects overlap to give the illusion of depth in their pictures. Sometimes one object cannot be distinguished from another because of the similarity of colour, texture, or shape. Wherever technical difficulties of this kind are encountered, the children should be shown how both other children and professional painters solve similar technical problems. They should see examples of the outlining of objects for clarity and pattern, of changing values, of the use of different texture effects, and of the play of light planes against dark ones. This type of study constitutes a valuable kind of picture appreciation lesson. The children look intelligently at the work of others because they have a personal interest in it.

The teacher can often help children to handle materials more effectively. The children should be given free "scribble" periods to test new media. Such hints as allowing one colour to dry before another is placed over it; words of caution about not dipping brushes in paint too deeply constitute effective guidance.

The teacher must remember one important fact about guidance. *Guidance is offered to assist children to say what they want to say in the way they want to say it.* Guidance is never offered as a prescription to paint in a manner which the teacher finds preferable for personal reasons.

(v) Treatment of the Finished Work

The finished work of children should receive praise and general recognition. The work should be displayed on the walls of the classroom and in the school halls. No marks or grades should be placed on the work. It should also be remembered that art cannot be graded, since no accurate measuring scale exists to gauge its quality. If the work is the child's own and if he has done his best, that is all anyone can ask.

4. WHAT MUST A TEACHER NOT DO?

In picture-making, children are supposed to say something about themselves and their lives. They are not supposed to say what the teacher tells them to say. A teacher must accept child-like work from children. She must not force adult ideas upon them. If a sky does not touch the earth in a child's picture, one can be quite sure that the child has good reasons as to why it should not do so.

A teacher should not give insincere and, therefore, vulgar little patterns to the children to reproduce. Patterns composed of circles, triangles or ovals to depict human beings, toys or other objects are merely a sign language which some grownups have devised because they think this work resembles that of children. Nothing could be further from the truth. Children do not naturally draw in this manner; they have a better way.

No child should be forced to do "exercises" in art "to improve his skill." Let his skill grow with his power of expression. Such exercises as drawing old hats or pussy-willows as they appear to the camera have no place in the art programme of children. Likewise drawing chalk boxes or lines of telegraph poles to learn perspective should be left out. Copying lilies and crosses for Easter, horns of plenty for Thanksgiving, or any other kind of grownup symbol should also be eliminated. Children have many exciting things to say about special feast days and holidays, but in other forms. Copying, tracing and colouring adult drawings are what used to be called "busy work." These activities may have kept the children's hands busy, but their thoughts and feelings took time off. This kind of busy work has nothing to do with either art or education.

In summary, the teacher must keep a "hands-off" policy in the art room as far as the actual production of work is concerned. Provided that the child's actions are socially acceptable, what a youngster says, and how he says it, is his own business. Guidance by the teacher, coupled with expression by the children, will result in charming painting and good education.

5. HOW DO BEGINNERS PAINT?

Every child paints in a different way. Nevertheless, children at certain ages show a number of similar general characteristics in their work. A teacher should know what these characteristics are in order to gain greater insight into the pictorial expressions of the children under her guidance.

(i) Making Scribbles

The very young child merely scribbles with crayons or paint. The scribbles are first made at random, but later become more organized into irregular circular shapes, or into series of rhythmic dots.

(ii) Naming Scribbles

The next step in painting occurs when a child appears to give names to the marks be makes. He may call a red blob of paint "teacher" and a blue streak across a page "a ride in my dad's car."

(iii) Painting "Me"

After naming scribbles, a child may paint symbols of himself. "I am walking," "I am eating" or "I am big" may be selected as titles. Sometimes he may add some scribbles to the picture of himself. Usually, however, he omits background and foreground in his paintings (See Plate 3).

The symbols which a child uses for himself may be a circular shape for a head with arms and legs attached. Later he may paint a head and a body with limbs placed in more or less their correct positions. He may also add such details as features to the face, and fingers to the hands (See Plate 3).

(iv) Painting "Me" With Others

After he depicts himself, a child soon adds others in association with himself. Also a setting for the depicted action may be given. Titles such as "Jim and I are playing in our garden," or "Jane and I are skipping in the park" are chosen.

Children have a variety of interesting methods of presenting their ideas. Their system for working out the relative proportions of objects should be understood. The most important objects are often made the largest and sometimes the brightest in colour. Mother coming out of a house may be made bigger than the house. "Me" is frequently the largest object drawn in any picture. Children may also exaggerate the size of only part of a body. "I am building an airplane" may show hands and arms (the "building" parts of the body) larger than the rest of the body (See Plate 3).

Young children frequently choose colours because they like them and not because they resemble nature. A girl painted with red hair is not necessarily a red-head in life, but is painted like that because "red is pretty." However, grass in pictures soon becomes green while sky becomes blue, as the child is more and more influenced by the colours in the world in which he lives.

The beginner often symbolizes the ground or the floor on which he is standing by a line near the bottom of the page. Later, this base line may be duplicated several times in the same picture. Finally, it may be made solid and thus develops into landscape.

Symbols for the sky are somewhat similar to those for terrain. The sky first appears as a line drawn along the top of the paper. Later it is brought down to touch the earth. The sky may appear in pictures earlier than the ground line.

Three interesting types of paintings may frequently be seen, called "the x-ray picture," "the fold-over picture," and "the series picture." In the x-ray picture, the child shows both the inside and outside of anything, from a tiger to a house, in the one composition (See Plate 5); in the series picture he will place in the same painting several events which occur at various times and in various places. These places and events are connected in thought, however. In painting a picture of "Our Thanksgiving Turkey," for example he might show the turkey in the pen, in the oven, and finally on the table ready to be eaten (See Plate 5). In the fold-over picture the child shows objects which are apparently standing on their heads or lying on their sides (See Plate 4). In dealing with the topic "Our team playing hockey," a boy might draw the sheet of ice as an oblong in the centre of the page, and then place the spectators as if lying with their feet towards and touching the boundary lines of the ice. Mentally, the adult observer must fold up the page at these boundary lines to make the spectators conform with the physical world. It should be noted that more than one of these three types of expression may be found in one picture (See Plate 5).

Paintings by very young children are full of thought and feeling. Their vigour and charm are delightful. By observing the paintings thoughtfully, the teacher may learn many facts about the children who make them. A child offers in his work a record of what he feels, what he thinks, and what he knows.

6. HOW DO GANG-AGERS PAINT?

As children become older, their thinking undergoes change and this change is reflected in their paintings. From the egocentric attitude of the young child there develops an attachment to the group or "gang." Boys band together and play at Robin Hood, and Cowboys and Indians. Girls go to parties and dress to impress other girls. One sex pretends to despise the other.

(i) Choosing Topics

Aggressive titles appear in the work of boys, such as "The Tigers beating the Hawks," and "Playing Cowboys and Killing Indians" (See Plate 7). Mechanical objects from steam shovels to space rockets are held in high esteem by boys (See Plate 6), while girls are attracted to topics which include clothes, social gatherings and the arrangement of hair (See Plate 8). Both sexes are interested in sports and dramatic stories.

It will be realized that group work such as puppetry and mural-making will be welcomed by children at this stage. Subject matter which includes necessary co-operation with others such as "Helping mother," "How we help to keep our city clean" is acceptable.

(ii) Developing Points of View

As children reach the gang stage, they gradually eliminate the early forms of expression from their paintings. In the place of symbolic forms, appear those which are more closely related to nature (Compare Plate 4 with Plate 8).

Children in the gang age frequently develop a personal point of view in their pictures. Some children obviously are what might be called "visual-minded." They show interest in the subtleties of colour and of the shapes of objects which may be observed in the physical world. These persons like to paint while observing an object, although they may, for aesthetic reasons (of which they are, of course, unaware at this stage) diverge from the natural appearance of the objects seen. They may also be interested in linear perspective and may attempt to use it at a fairly early age.

Other children show themselves to be what might be called "non-visual" in type. They are likely to express more of themselves in their work. Colour may be chosen because they like it, in a manner found almost universally in the work of very young children. As in the lower grades also, the "non-visual" children may distort objects in size so that those having greatest emotional significance to the painters are made largest. These people may depict a fragment of a situation rather than a panorama. Some detail which catches their interest will be isolated for attention. The environment for this detail may be limited only to those items which hold especial emotional appeal for the painters.

Of course, human beings do not always fall conveniently into categories. Many children may exhibit "visual" characteristics in some paintings, while they may display "non-visual" characteristics in other work.

(iii) Developing Methods of Working

After some years of practice with the tools and materials of picture-making, children begin to develop individual methods of working. Some children will continue to paint with broad brushes in the manner of younger children. Others outline their work first in pencil, chalk, or charcoal before applying paint. Some children make only drawing notes with the graphic media before painting, while others plan in greater detail.

There is no one way recommended for all children to paint. Each child must find the method which is best suited both to himself and to the style of painting which is related to the message he wishes to convey.

7. SUMMARY—WHAT SHOULD THE TEACHER REMEMBER ABOUT CHILDREN'S PICTURE-MAKING?

(i) Picture-making is the expression of a reaction to life; it is not a display of skill resulting from the photographic drawing of objects, the copying of pictures, or working under the rigid direction of a teacher.

(ii) Picture-making provides an opportunity for a child to learn about life in general in a manner which no other subject field can quite duplicate. No child can be said to be educated unless he enjoys a vigorous programme of picture-making.

(iii) Teachers have the following duties in connection with the picture-making programme:

(a) They must be sure that suitable supplies and equipment are available;

(b) They must see that the physical arrangements in the classroom are adequate;

(c) They must provide motivation for painting topics if the need is apparent;

(d) They must offer suitable and timely guidance;

(e) They must treat the finished work with respect.

(iv) Teachers must not force children to adopt adult forms of expression.

(v) Teachers should have an intimate acquaintance with the child-like forms of expression common to the various age groups:

(a) The youngest children go through the stages of scribble, named scribble, and symbol; they develop their ideas in symbolic form to depict what they think and feel;

(b) Children in the gang-age gradually tend to eliminate the child-like symbols from their expression and are more influenced by the natural appearance of objects; some children show a marked differentiation with regard to their approach to picture-making, and may be classified as "visual" and "non-visual" types; each type requires distinct treatment in the classroom.

(vi) Children develop different techniques which suit the individual people concerned; therefore, no one technical method of picture-making can be recommended for all children.